DEER HERD UNIT MANAGEMENT PLAN
Deer Herd Unit # 13
La Sal
April 2006

BOUNDARY DESCRIPTIONS

Grand and San Juan counties - Boundary begins at the junction of I-70 and the Green River; south on the Green River to the Colorado River; north on the Colorado River to US-191; south on US-191 to the Big Indian Road; east on this road to the Lisbon Valley Road; east on this road to the Island Mesa Road; east on this road to the Colorado State Line; north on this line to I-70; west on I-70 to the Green River.

LAND OWNERSHIP

Unit 13A - La Sal, La Sal Mountains

RANGE AREA AND APPROXIMATE OWNERSHIP

	Yearlong range		Summer Range		Winter Range	
Ownership	Area (acres)	%	Area (acres)	%	Area (acres)	%
Forest Service	0	0	104835	58	36361	13
Bureau of Land Management	23173	49	2276	1	194381	70
Utah State Institutional Trust Lands	1248	3	29956	16	26447	9
Private	4211	9	44945	25	20887	8
Department of Defense	62	0.1	0	0	0	0
National Parks	18075	39	0	0	0	0
Utah State Parks	0	0	0	0	0	0
Utah Division of Wildlife Resources	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	46769	100	182012	100	278076	100

Unit 13B - La Sal, Dolores Triangle

RANGE AREA AND APPROXIMATE OWNERSHIP

	Yearlong range		Summer Range		Winter Range	
Ownership	Area (acres)	%	Area (acres)	%	Area (acres)	%
Forest Service	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bureau of Land Management	0	0	0	0	87718	87
Utah State Institutional Trust Lands	0	0	0	0	9553	9
Private	0	0	0	0	3514	4
TOTAL	0	0	0	0	100785	100

UNIT MANAGEMENT GOALS

Manage the deer population for optimum herd size compatible with forage resources and existing land uses with emphasis on maintaining a diverse buck age structure. Consider various publics in managing deer to provide a diversity of hunting and viewing opportunities.

POPULATION MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

Target Herd Size

< Long-term Objective - Achieve a winter target population of 19,400 deer.
(13,000 deer on **La Sal Mountains** subunit and 6,400 deer on **Dolores Triangle** subunit).

< Short-term Objective (for 5-year life of this plan)
La Sal Mountains – No change needed in population objective. The range condition, as reflected in the mean DCI score from the 2004 range trend survey, is at upper end of "fair" classification range.

Dolores Triangle – A 20% reduction in population objective to 5,100 deer through 2011 is needed due to current poor range conditions indicated by low DCI values. Antlerless removal is not needed immediately because the current deer population is near 50% of objective and fawn production is poor. If the deer population approaches the short-term objective, antlerless removal in specific problem areas will be utilized. Although the DCI score from the 2005 range trend survey is at lower end of "poor" classification range, there is no apparent trend of DCI scores from previous surveys. The heaviest browse utilization is in small sagebrush parks in lower Westwater that are adjacent to agricultural fields. These fields concentrate large numbers of wintering deer in the area. Losses in browse cover and increases in annual grasses in the trend study plots in Westwater are largely responsible for the very poor DCI score. Browse utilization in other areas is not excessive and DCI scores are not as low. This deer herd is primarily managed by Colorado hunting strategies. The number of deer wintering in this unit is dependent on winter severity, but even with normal snow levels, recent deer numbers using this winter range have declined considerably due to low population. If range conditions on this subunit improve into the "fair" category, the population objective will be amended upward toward the long-term value of 6,400 deer.

	Objective from past plan (2001)	Long-term Objective	2006-2011 Objective	Change
La Sal Mountains	13,000	13,000	13,000	0
Dolores Triangle	6,400	6,400	5,100	-1,300
UNIT TOTAL	19,400	19,400	18,100	-1,300

Herd Composition

< **La Sal Mountains** – Maintain a region-wide three-year average postseason ratio of 15-20 bucks per 100 does.

< **Dolores Triangle** – Maintain a three-year average postseason ratio of 25-35 bucks per 100 does.

POPULATION MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Monitoring

< Harvest

La Sal Mountains - Buck harvest strategies will be developed through the RAC and Wildlife Board process to achieve management objectives for herd composition. Utilize antlerless harvest when population objectives are met or to address specific habitat and depredation concerns.

Dolores Triangle - Continue limited entry hunting to maintain herd composition objectives and quality hunting opportunities. Utilize antlerless harvest when population objectives are met or to address specific habitat and depredation concerns.

< Population Size - Herd population size will be estimated by computer modeling based on data from postseason and spring classifications, mortality estimates and harvest surveys. The **Dolores Triangle** deer population will be modeled by the Colorado Division of Wildlife as part of their Unit #40 deer herd. About 40% of this herd winters in Utah; therefore, 40% of Colorado's population estimate for Unit #40 was used as Utah's population estimate.

< Short-term Population Objective - Manage deer populations to attain satisfactory range conditions based on desirable components index (DCI) scores on winter ranges. Where winter range is a limiting factor, reduce current populations by 20% on any subunit when weighted DCI score falls in to "poor" classification or below. On subunits where winter range condition is classified as "fair" or better deer populations will be allowed to expand toward current long-term objectives.

Management toward short-term objectives should consider the following:

- Management efforts should focus on improving deer habitat and carrying capacity.
- Declines in winter range carrying capacity are currently not entirely a result of over utilization by deer.
- Population control (if needed) and habitat improvement projects should be focused on areas where range degradation is most prevalent.
- Short-term population objectives should be evaluated and updated every 5 years as new range trend data is compiled.
- Biologists should closely monitor winter ranges. If deer utilization is excessive and is causing range degradation and increased overwinter deer mortality, short-term objectives should be reduced.

< Buck Age Structure - Age class structure of the buck population will be monitored through the use of harvest check stations, field harvest checks, postseason classification, and uniform harvest surveys.

Limiting Factors (May prevent achieving management objectives)

< Crop Depredation - Damage complaints will be addressed in accordance with established state laws and DWR policies.

< Habitat - Monitor range conditions and deer use to maintain habitat quality necessary to achieve population objectives (see Habitat Management Strategies). Identify areas on the **La Sal Mountains** where deer escapement could be enhanced through permanent or temporary road closures or other restrictions on motorized access. The **Dolores Triangle** subunit is entirely winter range for the Colorado unit #40 deer herd. Excessive habitat utilization will be addressed through antlerless harvest in specific problem areas.

< Predation - Seek assistance from Wildlife Services when deer populations are depressed and when predator control efforts have a reasonable chance of aiding deer herd recovery. Increased cougar harvest will be recommended to benefit deer at low population levels. Predator control

and harvest will be conducted as prescribed by DWR predator management policy and unit predator management plans.

< Highway Mortality - Cooperate with Utah Dept. Of Transportation in construction of highway fences, passage structures and warning signs etc.

< Illegal Harvest - Implement specific preventive measures within the context of an action plan developed in coordination with the Law Enforcement Section when illegal kill has been identified as a significant source of deer mortality.

HABITAT MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

< Maintain and protect existing critical deer ranges sufficient to support the population objectives. Seek cooperative projects to improve the quality and quantity of deer habitat. Promote enhancement of habitat security and escapement areas for deer.

HABITAT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Monitoring

< Determine trends in habitat condition through permanent range trend studies, pellet transects, and field inspections. Land management agencies will similarly conduct range monitoring to determine vegetative trends, utilization and possible forage conflicts.

< Range trend studies will be conducted by DWR to evaluate deer habitat health, trend, and carrying capacity using the DCI. The DCI index was created as an indicator of the general health of big game winter ranges. The index incorporates shrub cover, density and age composition as well as other key vegetation variables. Changes in DCI suggest changes in winter range capacity. The relationship between DCI and the changes in deer carrying capacity is difficult to quantify and is not known.

Deer winter range condition on the La Sal Mountains Unit 13A, as indicated by DWR permanent range trend surveys.

Year	Mean DCI score for Subunit	Classification	Unit-specific DCI score range: Poor	Unit-specific DCI score range: Fair	Unit-specific DCI score range: Good
1994	56	Good	21 – 35	36 – 53	54 - 70
1999	56	Good			
2004	49	Fair			

Deer winter range condition on the Dolores Triangle Unit 13B, as indicated by DWR permanent range trend surveys.

Year	Mean DCI score for Subunit	Classification	Unit-specific DCI score range: Poor	Unit-specific DCI score range: Fair	Unit-specific DCI score range: Good
1995	17	Poor	10 – 24	25 – 44	45 - 64
2000	29	Fair			
2005	11	Poor			

Habitat Protection and Maintenance

< Work with public land management agencies to develop specific vegetative objectives to maintain the quality of important deer use areas.

< Continue to coordinate with land management agencies in planning and evaluating resource uses and developments that could impact habitat quality.

< Work toward long-term habitat protection and preservation through the use of agreements with land management agencies and local governments, and through the use of conservation easements, etc. on private lands.

Habitat Improvement

< Cooperate with federal land management agencies and private landowners in carrying out habitat improvements such as reseedings, controlled burns, water developments etc. on public and private lands.

< Cooperate with federal land management agencies and local governments in developing and administering access management plans for the purposes of habitat protection and escape or security areas.

PERMANENT RANGE TREND SUMMARIES

Unit 13A - La Sal, La Sal Mountains

There are 14 permanent range trend sites on the La Sal Mountains subunit. Three of these study sites are on summer range for deer and elk. Nine of the other 11 sites are on deer and elk wintering areas and the remaining two sites are deer winter range. These trend sites were last read in 1999.

Summer range sites had generally stable soils and herbaceous understory. However, plant composition on one site had shifted towards undesirable weedy species due to grazing

management practices and drought.

Trends on winter range sites were variable. The upper elevation sites showed generally stable or slightly downward trends in soil, browse and herbaceous understory while vegetative trends on the lower elevation sites were down primarily due to drought. On some important big game sites, browse trends were declining and herbaceous cover was predominated by undesirable species such as cheatgrass and snakeweed. Study sites on some of the more recent vegetative treatment areas had abundant forage for winter big game use. Maintenance of the older treatments has the best potential for improving the quality and quantity of available winter forage.

Unit 13B - La Sal, Dolores Triangle

Nine permanent range trend study sites on deer and elk winter range are located in the Dolores Triangle subunit. Data from these sites was last obtained in 1995. Four of the sites sample pinyon-juniper chainings completed in 1968. One site recently burned removing most of the pinyon-juniper. Soil trend and browse density on the other three sites were stable. Herbaceous trend was downward because of the prevalence of cheat grass. Four of the remaining five sites are sagebrush/grass and one is a blackbrush site. Browse trends are stable on these sites. Herbaceous cover on these sites is also dominated by cheat grass. Although cheat grass contributes to soil stability, other perennial species provide better forage for big game. Monitoring and control of pinyon-juniper invasion of the seedings is essential in maintaining adequate winter forage for big game on this unit.

Duration of Plan

This unit management plan was approved by the Wildlife Board on _____ and will be in effect for five years from that date, or until amended.

APPENDIX

Unit 13A - La Sal, La Sal Mountains

Grand and San Juan counties - Boundary begins at the junction of Interstate 70 and the Green River; then south on the Green River to the Colorado River; north on the Colorado River to Highway US-191; south on US-191 to the Big Indian Road; east on this road to the Lisbon Valley Road; east on this road to the Island Mesa Road; east on this road to the Colorado state line; north on this line to the Dolores River; northwest on this river to the Colorado River; northeast on this river to the Colorado state line; north on this line to I-70; west on I-70 to the Green River.

Unit 13B - La Sal, Dolores Triangle

Grand County - Boundary begins at the Utah-Colorado state line and the Colorado River; south along the state line to the Dolores River; northwest along the Dolores River to the Colorado River; northeast along the Colorado River to the Colorado state line.